

INCIDENT INFORMATION

(September 1991)

0660

INFORMATION GATHERING

(September 1991)

0661

Field information personnel are vital to a successful incident information operation. They are the eyes, ears, and legs of the information function. The ability to observe, communicate, anticipate, and evaluate the current situation while keeping on schedule with accurate, factual reports is essential to the incident information operation. Information officers should not get sidetracked from their specific assignment.

Field personnel must be alert for current or anticipated events. They must uncover accurate, current, interesting facts about the incident, the people affected, and the department personnel involved. Facts about individuals should include the full name, age, residence address, and other identifying details (except in the case of injuries).

Facts about property damage, available from the Incident Damage Assessment Team, should include an accurate address or location, name of owner and occupant, extent of damage, estimate of dollar loss, and when the damage occurred.

Field information personnel should relay all data to the Field Information Center for verification and approval by the Incident Commander prior to release.

The Assistant Information Officer gathers the initial information. Typically, this officer will:

- Talk to as many key individuals as possible to get a current report of conditions, progress, threats to property, etc. If the Assistant Information Officer is not familiar with the local roads, a local resident may serve as a guide.
- Make contact with incident line forces, air operations, groups of local citizens, other agency centers, etc.
- Get information from roadside residents, utility workers, road crews, sheriff, CHP, local police, repair teams, travelers, realtors, mail carriers, and store, restaurant, and service station operators.

Field information personnel should be briefed thoroughly, and attend incident briefings. They should check-out of the information center, and indicate travel routes, and confirm call-in times. Field information officers should call in about a half-hour before news deadlines whenever possible. In all instances, field officers should call in reports at least every two hours. Information officers should report significant developments immediately; they should not wait to report important information.

The Incident Information Officer shall ensure that at least one representative of the information function attend all briefings and planning meetings. The Incident Commander must approve any information obtained at these meetings prior to release.

"Incident Information" signs on a vehicle attract attention to the information officer's role as an information source for answering questions from the local citizens.

Many news agencies assign their own reporting staff to an incident. It is important for field information officers to contact reporters, direct them to the action, and to offer escorts. Information personnel should contact unescorted reporters to help them get their story and ensure their safety. Assistance to reporters includes providing accurate incident facts and photographic vantage points and interviews with incident officials.

Information personnel should choose an opportune time to talk to Command and General Staff, ask if there is any particular message they may want to convey, and be ready for "quotable" comments. However, information personnel must be sure to get approval before releasing quotes to the center.

Direct contact with top representatives of all participating agencies is important. Similarly, as new agencies become involved in the incident action, information personnel should attempt to open effective communication channels to ensure a steady flow of information concerning other agencies' activities.

PHOTOGRAPHY/VIDEOGRAPHY

0661.1

(September 1991)

CAL FIRE recognizes the value of incident photography and video for future reference. The department encourages information personnel to recognize and document large, complex incidents or accidents with photos or video tape. One option is to hire a professional photographer.

Field information personnel can also use photos from private citizens or local media. Information personnel should collect the photographer's names and addresses and obtain copies of these photos at a later date. Generally, only video footage actually used in newscasts is subject to a news outlet's stringent guidelines for release.

Internal use of photographic material provides CAL FIRE with opportunities to make changes in training and safety procedures.

Sacramento Headquarters contracts with the Department of Water Resources for video and still photo documentation of extended incidents. CAL FIRE grants these crews, accompanied by CAL FIRE personnel from Sacramento, all necessary access to the incident. Sacramento Headquarters, or the incident, initiates the crew's response.

OVERFLIGHTS AND USE OF AIRCRAFT

0661.2

(September 1991)

Pilots, firefighters, and the media recognize the hazard of nonemergency aircraft flying close to incident area. The need to regulate and control flights within the air space at fires is the subject of Federal Aviation Regulation No. 91.137 ([see Request for FAA](#))

Overflights in observation helicopters and aircraft must have prior clearance by the Incident Commander and Air Operations because special constraints apply to media aircraft in incident air space--approval and assignment of altitude, distance controls, etc.

When CAL FIRE dispatches airtankers to fires, ECC operators in many areas receive instructions to invoke the federal regulations closure rule. This rule applies five miles horizontally, in all directions, and up to 2,000 feet elevation over the fire. Media flights within this area require approval from Air Attack. Air Attack grants permission as fire conditions allow.

CAL FIRE does not intend to restrict flying unnecessarily or impose needless controls. In accordance with regional policies, CAL FIRE will make reasonable efforts to provide the media with the opportunity for aerial photography of fire action. CAL FIRE may take official news photographers on flights--as space, time, and regional policies allow---to obtain aerial views of incident conditions. However, passengers are not allowed on airtankers at any time.

The department prohibits aerial spectators in controlled airspace. Even aircraft from other public agencies and the news media must obtain prior permission to enter the controlled airspace. Information officers refer all requests for overflights or aerial broadcasts to the local air attack base. The air base manager obtains approval and specific instructions from Air Attack regarding approach, flight altitude, and radio monitoring directions.

MEDIA FLYOVERS

0661.2.1

(September 1991)

Information personnel must obtain the following information from reporters wanting to fly over an incident:

- Estimated time of arrival and departure
- "N" number
- Type and color of aircraft

- Media call sign
- Callback number

Information officers forward this information to Air Operations.

Information personnel should provide the following information for the reporter:

- Radio Frequency and call number for Air Attack
- When to contact Air Attack, number of miles away from the incident
- Altitude and orbit of Air Attack
- General landmarks
- Presence of other aircraft in area

FEDERAL AVIATION REGULATION (September 1991)

0661.2.2

To prevent congestion from sight-seeing aircraft and to provide a safe environment for disaster relief aircraft, the Incident Commander may issue a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM), a bulletin which designates temporary flight restrictions within the incident area.

Once the Incident Commander issues a Notice to Airmen, no person may operate an aircraft within the designated area unless:

- The aircraft is participating in and directed by an agency responsible for disaster relief activities.
- The aircraft operates from an airport within the incident area and does not hamper or endanger relief activities.
- An Instrument Flight Regulations (IFR), air traffic controller clearance specifically authorizes the aircraft's operation.
- VFR flight around or above the area is impracticable due to weather, terrain, or other considerations, prior notice is given to the air traffic service facility specified in the Notice to Airmen, and en route operation through the area is conducted so as not to hamper or endanger relief activities.

- The aircraft is carrying properly accredited news representatives, or people on official business concerning the incident. The aircraft must operate, in accordance with 91.137, above altitudes used by relief aircraft unless the relief agency provides authorization.
- Prior to entering the incident area, the operator files a flight plan with the air traffic service facility specified in the Notice to Airmen. The flight plan should include the following information:
 - Aircraft identification, type, and color
 - Radio communications frequencies to be used
 - Proposed entry and exit times
 - Name of news media or purpose of flight
 - Any other information deemed necessary by Air Traffic Control

IDENTIFICATION

0661.3

(September 1991)

Information personnel must be highly visible when operating in an emergency situation. They should draw the questions from bystanders, victims, and others. Therefore, personal identification is important. All information personnel should wear safety apparel in the fire area, an Information Officer nameplate on the right breast pocket of the outer garment, and Information Officer "stick-ons" on each side of the helmet.

Vehicles used in field operations should display magnetic fire information signs on both front doors and the trunk or tailgate. Additionally, some may use locally designed, folding triangular signs on the information vehicles' roofs while the vehicles are parked. Folding cardboard signs over a lowered sun visor identify the information vehicles to oncoming traffic and people at the roadside.

ESCORTING THE MEDIA

0661.4

(September 1991)

One duty of the Assistant Information Officer, is to make sure that official visitors and media representatives get to where the control action is occurring. All visitors should receive a ringside seat while being kept safe and clear of fireline activity.

The Assistant Information Officer serves as a courteous, official host, who anticipates locations of fire action and selects safe vantage points suitable for photographic and sound coverage. Like all field personnel, the Assistant Information Officer keeps abreast of the current incident situation. Specifically, he/she must know where the incident activity and control efforts are taking place. Since media representatives may determine the time for conducting tours, the Assistant Information Officer has little flexibility in deviating from this schedule.

The Assistant Information Officer should inform the Incident Commander of times for tours and media coverage in the area. If fire action permits and time allows, the Incident Commander may drop by briefly for questions and interviews.

In special groups of ranking officials, dignitaries, and other special guests, the Incident Commander or a special representative may accompany the touring group. To allow for this, the Assistant Information Office must notify the appropriate line officer of tour arrangements.

Visits from legislators and other dignitaries receive high priority. The Information Center and field function assists the Incident Commander by accompanying public officials and explaining incident facts. The visitor's special interests determine the tour itinerary but should meet the Incident Commander's approval. Normally, tours include the fire's action area, the Incident Base, and a brief visit with the Incident Commander or a representative.

After the tour, the visitor should have a clear picture of the incident and the control problems and be able to make accurate statements to the press or public.

Vehicles used to transport visitors, reporters, and equipment must be held to a minimum. Also, visitors should be discouraged from traveling in convoy or "on their own" because fire spread is rapid and unpredictable, particularly where its behavior is photographic and spectacular. Unfamiliar and unexpected hazards-- smoke, road blockages, fire traffic, and frightened evacuees--compounds the danger. The Assistant Information Officers must ensure personal safety and minimize visitor interference with incident operations.

WEIGHING THE FACTS

(September 1991)

0661.5

The Incident Information Center receives a great variety of information on a continuing basis. This steady input is the lifeblood of the center's existence. Thus, a timely report from the emergency operation's many elements is essential.

Field reports, briefings, radio traffic, personal observations, and discussions-- these elements allow information officers to generate a constant information flow. Personnel must recognize, verify, analyze for importance, and concisely record each item.

Most information requires verification. Information personnel must chase down rumors or unconfirmed reports. Hints of major action, changing situations, serious losses, or other significant events often can be identified in their earliest stages from radio traffic or personal observation. Speedy on-site assessment and confirmation with continual follow-up reporting is essential for changing or uncertain situations.

The media and others will not use all information collected. Local and distant outlets desire different amounts and types of information, and other news events influence the amount of detail used. The timeliness of incident developments prior to deadlines also affects the coverage and emphasis given to an incident.

Local residents want to know the particular details of actions and specific incident progress whereas others want only general summaries.

[\(see next section\)](#)

[\(see HB Table of Contents\)](#)

[\(see Forms or Forms Samples\)](#)